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House of Representatives

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN ED CASE OF HAWAII TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2005

A BILL TO NAME THE KAPALAMA POST OFFICE IN HONOLULU, HAWAII AFTER THE LATE U.S. SENATOR HIRAM L. FONG

Mr. President, I rise today in full support of a bill I have reintroduced to provide a small token of permanent recognition--the naming of the prominent Kapalama post office in Honolulu, Hawaii--of the late, great U.S. Senator Hiram L. Fong of Hawaii, whose long life--he died last August at the age of 97--was dedicated to reshaping, for the betterment of all, the social and political landscape of twentieth-century Hawaii.

Born into poverty in Honolulu on October 1907, Hiram L. Fong was the seventh of 11 children of Chinese-immigrant parents. His father, Fong Sau Howe, originally from China's Kwangtung Province, arrived in Hawaii in 1872, one of 45,000 Chinese immigrants who came to Hawaii to work on the plantations of the islands' once dominant sugar industry. His mother, Fong Lum Shee, arrived in Hawaii when she was 10 years old to work as a maid.

By all accounts, Hiram Fong was enterprising, even as a child. He shined shoes, delivered poi, sold newspapers, led visitors to local tourist spots as well as caddied nine holes of golf for 25 cents.

He attended Hawaii's public schools and was a member of McKinley High School's famous class of 1924, whose 216 members, many of them first-generation immigrants, became some of Hawaii's most distinguished lawyers, business executives, and public servants. Hiram Fong

himself became the first resident of Hawaii to receive the Horatio Alger Award for overcoming poverty to achieve great success in law, business, and public service.

As a student at the University of Hawaii, Fong found time to edit the student paper and the yearbook, become a member of the volleyball, rifle and debate teams, and serve as president of the YMCA and Chinese Students Alliance, all the while working at the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard as a supply clerk. He somehow managed to graduate from the University of Hawaii with honors in 1930 after just three years.

After working at what was then the Suburban Water System of Oahu from 1930 to 1932, Hiram Fong attended Harvard Law School. Upon graduation in 1935, he returned to Honolulu to work as a deputy city attorney.

In 1938, when he was 31, he founded the law firm of Fong, Miho, Choy and Robinson, and entered and won a race for a seat in the Territorial House of Representatives. A member of the Republican Party, he forged a coalition of independent Republicans and Democrats to win election as speaker of the Territorial House, where he would serve a total of 14 years, including three terms as speaker.

Fong's political career was interrupted by World War II, when he was called to active duty with

the Army Air Corps. He served as judge advocate with the 7th Fighter Command of the Seventh Air Force. He later retired as a colonel in the U.S. Air Force Reserve.

As a member of the Hawaii Territorial House, Fong supported legislation designed to help organized labor and working families. In 1945, he supported what became known as the "Little Wagner Act," which allowed agriculture workers to unionize. It was Hiram Fong's understanding of and identification with Hawaii's laborers and plantation workers and fellow immigrant families that enabled him, a Republican in an increasingly Democratic Party-dominated Hawaii, to continue winning elections.

His one electoral defeat, which ended the first phase of his political career, came in 1954, when he lost his race for re-election to the Territorial House seat by a mere 31 votes. Hiram Fong then focused on real estate, insurance, and investments, and established a number of successful island firms: Finance Factors, Finance Realty, Finance Home Builders, and Finance Investment, to name a few.

In the statehood year of 1959, Fong embarked on the second phase of his political career by running for and winning one of the two new United States Senate seats created for the newly established State of Hawaii. He won re-election in 1964 and 1970, and served with honor and distinction, beloved by all in his native Hawaii and beyond, until his retirement on January 2, 1977. At his retirement, Senator Fong was the ranking Republican on the Senate Committee on Post Office and Civil Service.

But even then, Senator Fong, as he was universally known thereafter with great affection, returned home and to his various business enterprises and to the devotion of and to his expanded family. Well into his nineties, he was a remarkable sight as he strode through downtown Honolulu on his way to and from work, excited by what the day brought and eager to continue his long string of accomplishments. At his death, his body lay in state in Hawaii's State Capitol as whole generations of citizens paid tribute to a

remarkable man who led a remarkable life.

It is both fitting and appropriate that we provide this modest memorial, as he would have wished, in order to remember the essence of public service and a life well lived by Hawaii's quintessential native son, Hiram L. Fong.